



## **Connecticut Department of Public Health**

### **Testimony Presented Before the Committee on Environment**

**February 15, 2023**

**Commissioner Manisha Juthani, MD  
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#### **House Bill 6606, An Act Concerning the Use of Certain Products Made From Polystyrene**

The Department of Public Health (DPH) provides the following information on House Bill 6606, which requires the department to enforce and report on discontinuing use of school trays made from polystyrene and prohibits the use of certain polystyrene food containers by restaurants. Thank you for raising the bill and for the opportunity to testify on this important issue.

The Department of Public Health acknowledges the potential health impacts of polystyrene containers. It is not economically viable to recycle these materials, and many end up in landfills. Being lightweight, they are easily dispersed by wind and are a common source of litter in our land and water environments. They are not biodegradable and produce dangerous chemicals and greenhouse gases when degrading. This can negatively impact freshwater and marine environments and their associated food stocks. Incinerated polystyrene produces carbon dioxide, a known greenhouse gas.

Styrene is designated as a potential human carcinogen by the US Department of Health and Human Services, and it is regulated as a public water system contaminant, with a federal Environmental Protection Agency maximum contamination level of 0.1 mg/L. The FDA has set limits on the amount of free styrene in polystyrene containers, but additional styrene can leach from containers into the food or drink based on the fat content, surface area of the food container, food temperature, and time in the container. This means that long term storage and reheating of food or drink in such containers can result in increased exposure to styrene by the consumer.

The discontinued use may reduce demand on production for these containers. Manufacturing these containers requires the use of fossil fuels, and production releases chemical byproducts that can contaminate air, water, and nearby communities. This includes the release of hydrocarbons that react with nitrogen oxides that create ground level ozone which can directly impact human health by causing respiratory illness and distress. This release of greenhouse gases contributes to climate change and its associated health effects. The reduced demand from schools and restaurants may lessen the aforementioned impacts.

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While we recognize the public health and environmental benefits of the bill, it presents some procedural problems. The bill authorizes three State agencies and local health departments to exercise their own discretion in deciding whether to enforce the bill's provisions, but does not require any coordination among such agencies, or designate any one agency to be responsible for taking the lead. Furthermore, the three State agencies are required to jointly submit a report on this discretionary enforcement, without procedures or defined criteria for gathering the relevant information. Lastly, these activities are not identified in the Governor's budget.

Thank you for your consideration of this information. DPH encourages committee members to reach out with any questions.